

VZCZCXRO6349
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHEG #0736 0741336
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 151336Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4042
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 000736

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS: APPROVED BY SHURA
COUNCIL, AS OPPOSITION UNITES AGAINST THEM

REF: CAIRO 671

Classified By: Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
Catherine Hill-Herndon, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: Egypt's Shura Council approved President Mubarak's constitutional amendments package on March 13; the 34 proposed amendments will be debated and voted upon by the People's Assembly on March 18-20, followed by an April 4 national referendum. An unusual joint statement signed by all major opposition forces was released on March 12, "rejecting" the amendments. There appears to be no unified opposition approach as yet on whether to urge voters to boycott the April 4 referendum or simply to vote against the amendments. End summary.

12. (SBU) At a March 13 session of the Shura Council, Egypt's upper parliamentary chamber, the proposed 34 amendments to the Egyptian constitution were approved by a vote of 229 in favor, 4 against, and 4 abstentions. The four votes against the amendments were from opposition parties Al Wafd (2), Taggamu (1), and Osama al Ghazali Harb, founder of the new, as-yet-unlicensed Democratic Front Party. The amendments package will go before the People's Assembly for debate and a final vote on March 18-20, to be followed by an April 4 national referendum.

13. (SBU) On March 12, opposition forces with parliamentary representation (the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Al Wafd, Taggamu, the yet-to-be licensed Karama party, and numerous independents) held an unusual joint press conference at Al Wafd headquarters, releasing a joint statement signed by more than 100 MP's rejecting the amendments. The communique highlighted the planned changes to Article 88 ("it eliminates full judicial supervision over elections") and Article 179 ("it will grant the president the power to strip citizens of their guaranteed freedoms and rights, and open the door to a police state in Egypt"). In comments at the press conference, MB parliamentary bloc leader Mohamed Saad al Katatni stated that MB parliamentarians would boycott the March 18-20 parliamentary debate on the amendments, as, "we cannot accept serving as false witnesses to a constitutional crime." He asserted, "in order for us to be constructive, we made practical proposals during the drafting process, but we, and the rest of the opposition, were completely excluded from the committee charged with drafting the amendments ... These amendments were drafted by a single party, and consequently, serve only the interests of the ruling National Democratic Party."

14. (C) Mounir Fakhry Abdel Nour, secretary-general of the Wafd Party, told poloff that there is no agreement as yet among the opposition about adopting a unified approach towards the April 4 national referendum - "we have not decided even internally within our own party on whether to

urge voters to boycott the referendum, or to vote against the amendments." Abdel Nour said that Wafd leaders would meet on April 1 or 2 to decide on the party's stance, and that the leadership of the Taggamu party wanted to coordinate the two parties' positions. At the March 12 press conference, the MB's Katatni noted, with no further elaboration, that, "the MB is looking into options for dealing with this referendum."

15. (SBU) The opposition movement "Kefaya" will reportedly hold a March 15 protest against the amendments in central Cairo's Liberation Square, to launch a campaign urging voters to boycott the April 4 referendum. Leaders of the influential Judges Club have been vehemently critical of the planned amendments to articles 88 and 179, noting that they expect "flagrant rigging" of the referendum and the late spring Shura Council elections. Mahmoud al Khodairi, head of the Alexandria Judges Club, has publicly urged judges to not participate in future elections, so as not to be, "trapped in the vise of symbolic, incomplete judicial supervision, and to avoid defaming the reputation of judges by participating in the expected rigging." In a marked change from past comments, Khodairi has also noted publicly that, "without complete judicial supervision, there must be foreign monitoring (of Egyptian elections); such foreign monitoring would not violate Egyptian sovereignty, because all major powers utilize such supervision."

RICCIARDONE